

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, CA

SUBJECT: SPARRING CONTINUES IN QUEBEC LABOR CONFLICT

REF: QUEBEC 91 AND PREVIOUS

1. MANEUVERING FOR ADVANTAGE CONTINUES BETWEEN GOQ AND QUEBEC PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES, AS HOSPITAL WORKERS AND TEACHERS IN CEGEPS (JUNIOR COLLEGES) WALKED OFF JOBS TODAY IN LATEST STRIKE ACTION. 48-HOUR STRIKE HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN PLANNED FOR ENTIRE COMMON FRONT. HOWEVER CEQ, REPRESENTING MAJORITY OF TEACHERS IN FRONT, REVERSED ITS STRIKE ORDER LATE LAST NIGHT IN ORDER CONSIDER LATEST GOVT CONCESSIONS AND NOT TO APPEAR TOTALLY NEGATIVE IN NEGOTIATIONS. BARRING UNEXPECTED BREAKTHROUGH, CEQ EXPECTED JOIN TOMORROW IN SECOND DAY OF CURRENT WALKOUT.

2. GOVT ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY THAT IT WAS FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATION OF 3-MEMBER COMMISSION CREATED BY BILL 23 AND WOULD PAY OUT 17 PERCENT SALARY ADJUSTMENT TOTALLING 400 MILLION DOLLARS TO 240,000 PUBLIC AND PARA-PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING COMMON FRONT MEMBERS. IN ADDITION, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PROMISED RESOLUTION OF LOCKOUT PROBLEM WHICH CEQ CONSIDERS ESSENTIAL TO RESTARTING FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS. GOQ REFUSED DROP CHARGES ALREADY INSTITUTED AGAINST LABOR LEADERS FOR DEFIANCE OF BILL 23. IT HAS AGREED, HOWEVER, NOT TO PRESS FURTHER CASES IF "ILLEGAL STRIKES" CEASE. FINALLY, TO RESTART TALKS

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WITH HOSPITAL WORKERS, GOQ OFFERED TO NAME, WITH UNION APPROVAL,

A SPECIAL CONCILIATOR CHARGED WITH DRAWING UP A COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT WITHIN 30 DAYS. GOVT OFFER, HOWEVER, WAS NOT ENOUGH TO STOP STRIKE WHICH ALREADY HAD BEEN SET IN MOTION.

3. MEANWHILE, IN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR, WHERE WORKERS WILL BE WITHOUT CONTRACT AND FREE TO STRIKE AS OF MAY 1, GOVT IS CONSIDERING PROLONGING PRESENT DECREE FOR PERIOD OF SEVERAL MONTHS. ALTHOUGH QUEBEC FEDERATION OF LABOR, REPRESENTING MOST CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, HAS PROMISED NOT TO STRIKE OLYMPIC SITE, GOVT REMAINS TOO DISTRUSTFUL TO ADOPT "LAISSEZ FAIRE" POLICY IN SECTOR SO RECENTLY SCENE OF CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE AND IS EXPECTED TO EXTEND DECREE BEFORE EXPIRATION APRIL 30.

4. COMMENT:

APPEARS BOTH SIDES IN CURRENT DISPUTE ARE ACTING WITH RESTRAINT IN AVOIDING PUSHING OPPONENT INTO CORNER, WHILE CONTINUING TO MAINTAIN SUFFICIENT PRESSURE TO FORCE DESIRED CONCESSIONS. GREATEST DANGER IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES IS MISCALCULATION BY ONE SIDE OR OTHER WHICH COULD SET OFF CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO A COMPLETE BREAKDOWN WITH GENERAL STRIKE, WIDESPREAD CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, AND EXTENSIVE REPRESSIVE ACTION BY GOQ. RECENT CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED MOVES BY BOTH SIDES ENCOURAGE VIEW THAT BOTH WISH AVOID DESPERATE CONFRONTATION WHILE CAREFULLY MANEUVERING TO EXTRACT MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE.
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